

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

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Volume 65 | Number 2 (Spring 2006)

pps. 262-263

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## Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Bowes, John P. "Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails." *The Annals of Iowa* 65 (2006), 262-263.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1055>

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when he discusses the Underground Railroad or John Brown in Iowa in general terms. But when he tells the story of John Todd and the Underground Railroad in southwest Iowa, events with which he is intimately familiar, Morgans is at his best.

*Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails*, by Michael L. Tate. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xxiv, 328 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer John P. Bowes is assistant professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University. His book, *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2007.

Over the past century and more a steady diet of dime-store novels and Hollywood movies have constructed an indelible image of nineteenth-century pioneer wagon trains under attack by hordes of Plains Indians out for blood, women, and material gain. In *Indians and Emigrants*, Michael Tate tackles this interpretation of westward expansion that has been imbedded in the American public's imagination since the first hardy men and women left towns such as Independence, Missouri, in their wake. Yet this is not his sole mission. He also works hard to avoid oversimplifying a complex history by addressing the perspectives of all the parties involved in these western meetings. Because it is an in-depth examination of the available resources covering the years from 1840 to 1870, he hopes that his book will counter "popular images of savage Indians perpetually attacking intrepid pioneers and greedy whites brutalizing noble Indians" (xx).

Tate makes clear in his introduction that he is deeply indebted to the scholarship that has come before him; he is especially eager to point out the value of John D. Unruh Jr.'s *Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (first published in 1979), a scrutiny of Indian-white relations along the many emigrant trails. Indeed, Unruh and others such as Glenda Riley have already used statistical analyses to undermine the notions of ongoing Indian violence against pioneers during the peak decades of western travel. Although Tate points out the value of such previous scholarship, he also proposes that those books have not managed to cover the entire story. Not only do perceptions of pervasive conflict between Indians and emigrants remain, but also the viewpoints of Indian peoples along the trail have usually been left out of the picture.

*Indians and Emigrants* is therefore constructed both to emulate the studies that examined a broad scope of this period of American expansion and to advance that scholarship through the inclusion of na-

tive perspectives and understandings. The book is organized more thematically than chronologically over the course of its ten chapters, and Tate deals with everything from the tales of captivity and Indian massacres to the moments when Indians and travelers helped each other and came to mutual understandings about their meetings on the overland trails. Most important, he balances his analysis between the two sides of the encounter. For example, anecdotes describing Indian assistance to struggling pioneers are presented along with incidents of kindness towards Indian men and women along the trail.

The strength of this book rests in several connected points that Tate returns to throughout the text. He emphasizes that the brief nature of encounters on emigrant trails made it difficult for any of the parties to establish a lasting relationship or cultural understanding. Because the window of each encounter was often so small, the possibility of misunderstanding loomed large. This was a particularly critical issue for the white men and women who began their journey with preconceived notions of the Indian encounters to come. As Tate illustrates so well, the Indian communities who lived along the trail faced the almost impossible task of overcoming a relentless wave of preconceptions and fears fashioned by letters home, newspaper editorials, and other contemporary accounts. As a result, the white emigrants' perception of reality eclipsed the actual reality on the trail. And, Tate discovered time and time again in his research, white emigrants were more likely to act quickly on their misconceptions than to attempt to obtain more information.

The source of the book's strength can also be seen as the well-spring of its primary weakness. Tate examined a vast array of traveler accounts, letters, and diaries to ground his study, and that depth provides a wonderful bibliography for readers and lends tremendous credence to his assertions. Such voluminous records, however, also lead the author to spend a great deal of time in each chapter presenting a host of anecdotes to support his points. The resulting argument, while historically convincing, does not always make for a smooth narrative. In the end, however, that is a minor critique; the importance of Tate's work outweighs such concerns. Indeed, perhaps the perceived need to present example after example is simply a reflection of the continued weight of popular imagery of Indian-white relations on the emigrant trails in the nineteenth century.